

Model Meeting Code Amendments - Online Submission Form : Entry # 12379

1. Your Details

I would like my name and personal details to be treated as confidential:

I consent to my details being shared

Name:

Catherine Merchant

Email:

[REDACTED]

Which of the following best describes you?

Member of the public

2. Targeted Questions

2.1. Will the proposed amendments made in the consultation draft of the Model Meeting Code achieve the policy outcomes identified in the paper?

My main area of focus is on Hunters Hill Council and the decisions they have made in relation to the development of Public land. In particular the construction of a new building on Crown reserve Boronia Park using public grant money, personal donations and Council reserves and recurrent funds. The full costs of the new building have not been disclosed in meeting reports and minutes and a number of financial adjustments during construction were made in closed session. No reports or specific details about the financial adjustments have been published on the Council website. I feel that the proposed amendments in relation to pre-meeting briefings and closed session will go some way in achieving the policy outcomes identified in your discussion paper with particular reference to the first two dot points under "promoting transparency, integrity and public participation". However, dot point one relies on an impartial Mayor. My experience in relation to the Boronia Park building has been that the current Mayor has received material of direct consequence to progressing funding for the building that has not been fully disclosed via Mayoral minute or discussed at a Council meeting. Dot point two is more strongly worded than what is being proposed for the model code ie "...as soon as practicable after the meeting..". In my experience of Hunters Hill Council matters dealt with under closed session are not published in the minutes except to state a somewhat meaningless resolution and not report that was presumably provided to Councillors is attached. "As soon as practical" should be removed.

2.2. Are there any other amendments you would suggest that will achieve these policy outcomes?

Another concern that I have observed at Ryde as well as Hunters Hill is that of delegation to the General Manager when Council ceases at the end of the year. Sometimes this seems to address those matters that have accumulated but not been completed during the year. It is possible planning decisions are also delegated but often a full report is received about such decisions made under delegation. In relation to the Boronia Park building delegation has been made for the General Manager to progress matters but there never seems an adequate report on decisions made during the period of delegation. I feel the meeting code of conduct should address delegated matters to highlight that these should not be used to reduce public confidence and opportunity for comment. The recent construction of the works depot on Boronia Park highlights why I have these concerns: the matter was discussed in closed session in the final Council meeting of the previous term of Council. Minutes in the October meeting record the resolution to award a contract and delegate to the General Manager to progress construction. No community consultation occurred and the location of the depot relies on an entry made to the Plan of Management some years ago after the independent consultants report to Council. Council at the time added a sports storage shed to the PoM. The Model Meeting Code needs to capture the process of delegation as it can transfer significant decision making to the General Manager with poor accountability requirements.

2.3. Will the proposed amendments have any unintended consequences?

Hopefully Councillors won't find a way to discuss matters out of session, caucus etc so as to avoid full public disclosure of matters that are under their review. Unfortunately General Managers will always have to "play the politics" of the particular

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elected Council. Separating the responsibility for notices of motion with financial implication to the Mayor and Councillors may better support a General Manager in defending the integrity of previously adopted financial reports and achieving improved accountability. It may assist in improved public transparency in financial reports that are generally inaccessible to the average resident.

2.4. Are there any other amendments the Government should consider?

No.

Notes



Admin Notification (ID: 66d4f054bfdd8)

added January 11, 2025 at 11:11 am

WordPress successfully passed the notification email to the sending server.